

Report

Steamtown National Historic Site

■ 1.0 Site Description

Located in downtown Scranton, Pennsylvania, Steamtown National Historic Site (NHS) was created in 1986 to interpret the story of main line steam railroading between 1850 and 1950. The park occupies 40 acres of the Scranton railroad yard of the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad and includes historic railroading buildings, some dating from 1865. Steamtown NHS operates three historic steam locomotives. The new core complex area, consisting of the restored 1902 Roundhouse, the 1937 Roundhouse, Visitor Center, 250-seat Theater, History Museum and Technology Museum, opened in 1995. One of the ways Steamtown preserves the past is through the Restoration Shop.

Visitors to Steamtown pay an entrance fee for the museum (\$8.00 adults, \$3.00 for children six to 12) and an excursion fee (\$12 adults, \$6.00 for children six to 12) with discounted combination fees. The excursion consists of a 26-mile, two-hour trip to Moscow, Pennsylvania and is available during the summer months by reservation.

The park is accessible from the north and south via I-81, from the east via I-84 and I-380, and from the west via I-80. The Northeast Extension of the Pennsylvania Turnpike also provides north-south access. Most visitors arrive by private automobile.

Steamtown leases part of its property to the Electric City Trolley Museum, a facility dedicated to preserving the history of eastern Pennsylvania's first electric railways. The museum is managed on a day-to-day basis by Lackawanna County and is not part of the national park system. It occupies a nineteenth-century mill building that has been restored as an interpretive center, complete with 50-seat theatre and numerous displays. Several vintage trolleys are on view, and a trolley excursion is set to begin service in the spring of 2001. The excursion will follow the Laurel Line electric interurban railroad, carrying visitors from the main passenger platform of Steamtown along a portion of the former Lackawanna & Wyoming Valley Railroad right-of-way to the Historic Iron Furnaces and back.

■ 2.0 Existing ATS

The local transit system in Scranton, known as COLTS, is operated by Lackawanna County. Martz Coach Lines operates intercity bus service as does Greyhound. Plans are now underway to reinstate passenger rail service from Scranton to Hoboken, New Jersey. Commuter rail service to Hoboken, with connections to Midtown Direct trains traveling to New York City, will provide relief for commuters traveling on congested Interstates 78

and 80. Rail service should benefit Steamtown NHS as well. The new train station will likely be located in the old Scranton railroad yard, a few hundred yards from Steamtown and the Trolley Museum. Since the park, by its very nature, attracts train enthusiasts, rail service should have stronger than average appeal among visitors. Scranton-Hoboken passenger rail restoration is expected to be complete by 2003 or 2004 and has the backing of both Steamtown and the local community. The city of Scranton hopes to build a multi-level parking garage in the vicinity of the new station.

■ 3.0 ATS Needs

Given the railroad orientation of this historic site, the Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) needs for Steamtown relate to the visitor experience itself. The site is quite large and as such is difficult to cover on foot. Walking is made difficult and dangerous by the presence of railroad tracks and the lack of paved pathways. Park staff are considering a transportation exploratorium/education center to be located approximately one-half mile to the east of the current activity areas. The need exists, therefore, for some form of intrapark ATS to connect the various sites, both present and future, and to enhance visitor mobility.

Park officials have expressed interest in a (steel wheel on rail) trolley. However, the system should not rely on the traditional catenary-pantograph system of electric power feed, because stringing overhead wires throughout the park would cause visual blight and would be at odds with the park's steam-based history. (The Trolley Museum, it should be noted, runs its electric trolleys outside the park only.) Park officials favor a trolley powered by fuel cells or another alternative fuel source instead.

■ 4.0 Basis ATS Needs

Given the rail orientation of Steamtown NHS, further exploration of ATS options appears warranted. An innovative trolley system running on tracks within the site and powered by an alternative fuel source would provide a creative solution to the problem of intrapark mobility, and permit the park to pursue its expansion plans, notably the construction of an exploratorium some distance away from the current activity zone.

■ 5.0 Bibliography

Steamtown Official Map and Guide.

Park Web Site: www.nps.gov/stea.

■ 6.0 Persons Interviewed

Terry Gess, Steamtown National Historic Site, January 16, 2001

Tim McGrath, Electric City Trolley Museum, January 17, 2001